Hans Christian Andersen

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN · 1805 - 2005 · 200 YEARS

The Little Mermaid

Her Story - The Writer and The Fairytale

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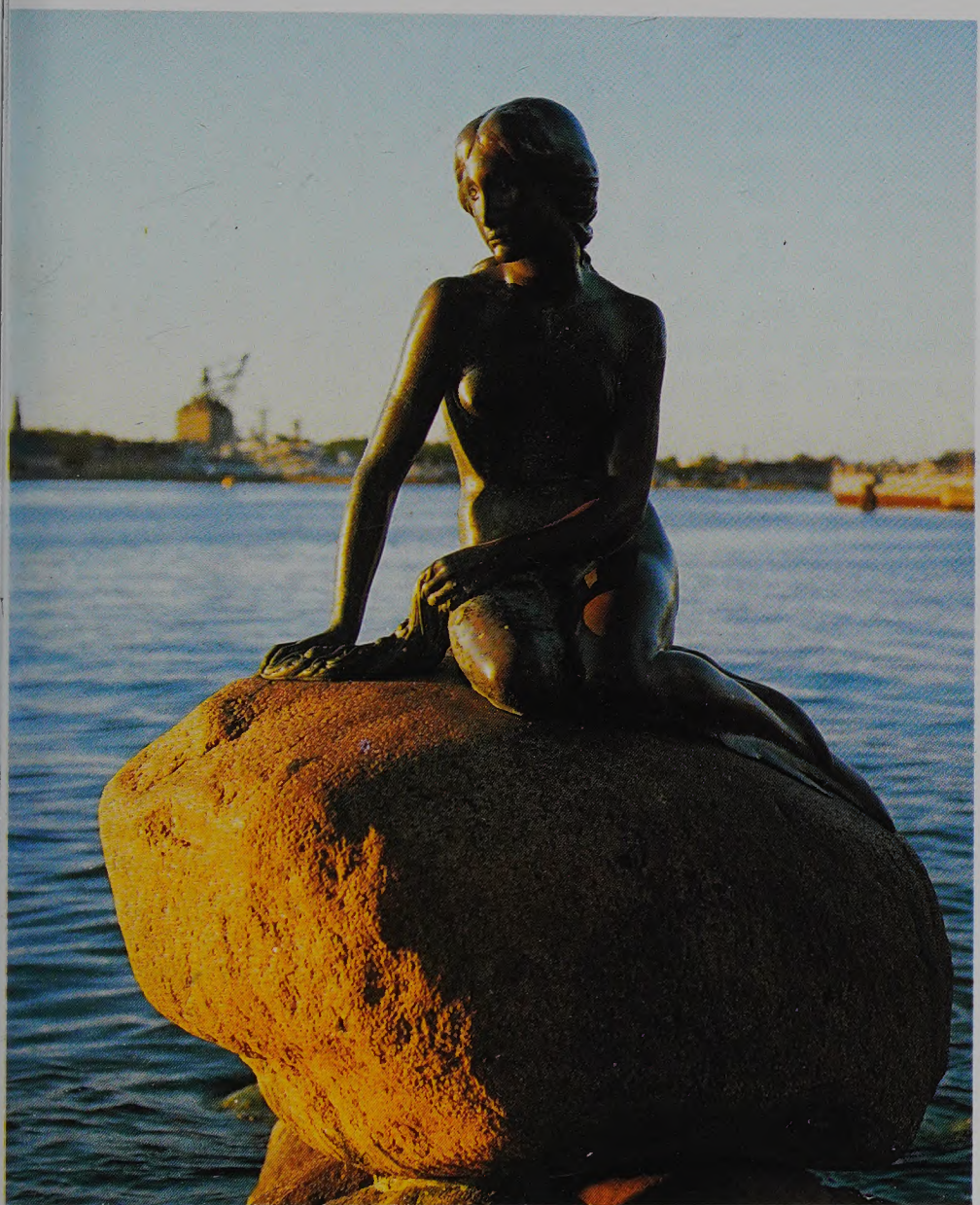
The Fairy Tale and Reality

Many of Denmark's visitors feel that The Little Mermaid at Langelinie, along the Copenhagen waterfront, is a symbol of the country. The small, unpretentious statue looks like something out of a fairy tale - and rightfully so. The Little Mermaid, as everyone knows, is the child of Hans Christian Andersen's genius.

Experts find traces of Danish folk songs and German literary romanticism in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale from 1837.
Art critics consider Edvard Eriksen's statue from 1910-1912 to be an expression of the "sensitive" style of late Naturalism.

Regardless of the debate on the artistic value of the statue, The Little Mermaid is the most famous and cherished of all Danish sculptures, both inside and beyond the borders of the country. She is a dream, a riddle, a story.

The statue inspires endless discussion of who the mermaid is and what she really represents. Meanwhile, there she sits, a melancholy dreamer somewhere between our world and her own, far out to sea, where the water is as blue as the petals of the most beautiful cornflower.



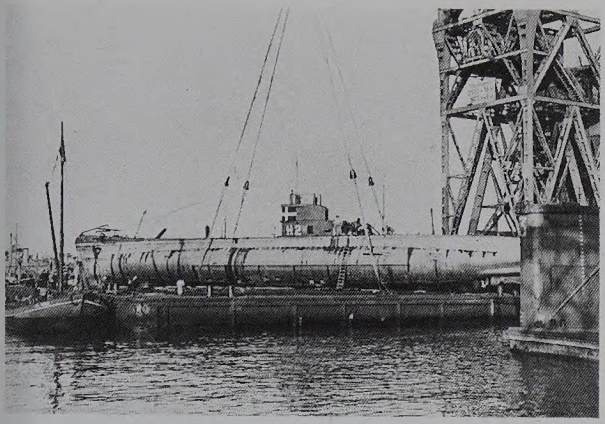
In this book, the reader meets the mermaid myth, the poet, the dancer, the sculptor and the others who created The Little Mermaid and made her world famous. The reader also meets Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Little Mermaid".

The mermaid myth

There have been tales of mermaids for at least 3,000 years, and the accounts are so numerous that it can be difficult to believe that there ever was a time when they did not exist.

From antiquity, Plinius the Elder (23-79 A.D.) assures us in his Natural History that the sea is teeming with mermaids, and he refers to several accounts from the time of Emperor Augustus. A famous example from Danish history is the mermaid who appeared in 1576 to a peasant on Samsø - an island in the Kattegat - and directed him to tell the King that the expectant Queen would give birth to a son, who would one day be "a great Nordic king". However, there was a condition for a fortunate outcome: the King had to promise to fight against "sin, immorality and the devil". The peasant was richly rewarded and the King promised - if not to mend his own ways - at the very least, to keep a careful eye on his subjects. The Queen gave birth to a son, later to become Christian IV, King of Denmark and Norway from 1588-1648. No doubts were raised at the time about the peasant's account of his meeting with the prophetic mermaid. A dawning scepticism from natural scientists was first heard in the 1600's.

Mermaids in fresco from the beginning of the 1500's (Helligåndskirken, Aalborg). The alluring song of the mermaids, not without its dangers, was a fixed element of the myth, both in the Middle Ages and in the later Romantic period.



During the German occupation of Denmark from 1940-45, the Danish navy sank as many of its own ships as possible. Here the submarine Mermaid is being raised by the occupying forces.

Lead character in the Walt Disney animated film "The Little Mermaid" from 1989. © DISNEY. This modern little mermaid has also gained popularity in Hans Christian Andersen's homeland, although fairy-tale lovers have expressed concern about the drastic change in ending.

The belief in mermaids and other mythical creatures reached its high point in the Middle Ages. Mermaids were painted in frescos, carved in wood and sculpted in stone in churches all over Europe. Mermaids can be found in 15 churches in Denmark.

Shipbuilders allied themselves with the Fates of the sea, either in the choice of name for the ship, or by using a mermaid as a figurehead. Throughout what amounts to the entire history of the Danish navy, there has always been at least one ship named the MERMAID. Most recently, a fishing inspection ship and a submarine have been christened with the tradition-filled name.

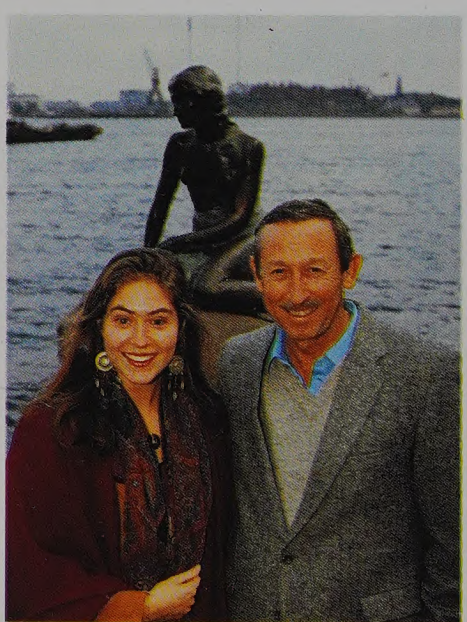
A great many of the accounts of mermaids arise from the seas near the British Isles and the Scandinavian countries. There is nothing strange about that, since these are sea-faring nations, either enclosed by or bordering on the sea.

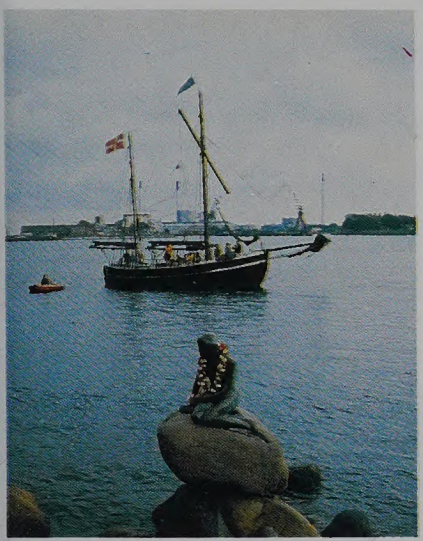
Copenhagen's Little Mermaid

Today, just as in antiquity and the Middle Ages, the mermaid is desirable, enigmatic, not uninterested in men and therefore perhaps not without danger.

Traditions have grown up around The Little Mermaid at Langelinie quay in Copenhagen. Sailors from all over the world honour her with flowers and kisses, believing that she brings them luck. She is undoubtedly the most photographed "girl" in the world. Countless celebrities have allowed themselves to be immortalized alongside her. (Below: Sissel Kyrkjebø and Roy Disney)

Unfortunately, not everyone loves The Little Mermaid. She has been vandalized on several occasions, usually with paint. The worst act of vandalism occurred in 1964, when her head was sawed off and removed.





Well-wishers from all over the world gathered to pay tribute to The Little Mermaid on her 75th birthday in 1988. The floral wreath around her neck was a birthday present.

Technical studies showed that the wicked deed was carried out with a hacksaw in the course of two nights. It is generally believed that the motive was hate for the "sensitive" style of late Naturalism, but the perpetrator was never found. The plaster original from 1912 is still kept at a bronze foundry, so today there is no sign of the disfigurement. However, Langelinie was without its mermaid for a month.

A Delightful Inspiration

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, The Little Mermaid, is the product of one of the most delightful inspirations in world literature. The story was written at a time when the poet had thought of abandoning the fairy-tale form. Andersen said that writing it gave him the courage to find himself.

Hans Christian Andersen was 32 years old when the fairy tale was published in 1837, in the third collection of his "Fairy Tales, Told for Children". In a preface, Andersen stated that his desire to write fairy tales had waned - the first tales had been labelled "highly insignificant" or silently ignored by critics. Andersen wrote: "While working on a larger, rather different (from these fairy tales) type of work, the idea for and the development of a new tale, 'The Little Mermaid', persisted within me. I had to write it down.... In a small country, the poet is always a poor man. Honour is therefore the golden bird he must strive to catch. We shall see whether I can capture it by telling fairy tales."

Hans Christian Andersen captured it indeed. His fairy tales won him immortal fame. They have been translated into 108 different languages.

Andersen was born in 1805 and grew up in Odense, on the island of Funen. His childhood was ridden with poverty. In 1819, he left his native town and set out to seek his fortune in Copenhagen. He made two unsuccessful attempts at a career, as a ballet dancer and opera singer, before finding his own métier . . .

He became the most eccentric figure of the so-called literary Golden Age of Denmark in the nineteenth century. He was a restless, searching soul who never had a wife, a home or a family. An extraordinary figure with an extraordinary face, his clumsy and uncouth manners flabbergasted the cultivated Copenhagen society upon whom he thrust himself.
However, in intellectual circles in the Danish capital, there were always a few people who paid attention to Andersen's exceptional talent. Wealthy patrons kept food on his plate until he had obtained the fame he so fervently desired.
Public means were found to give the talented child of the proletariate a six-year education - a strict school, which his natural talent survived. After a few novels, travel accounts and a play, the first fairy tales were published in a little pamphlet in 1835. They went largely unrecognized in Denmark, but were received with great excitement many other places in the world. This enthusiasm - and delight in "The Little Mermaid" - encouraged Andersen to continue. Collection after collection appeared, finally totalling more than 150 fairy tales. Andersen's fellow Danes also discovered what a treasure the fairy tales were, during the lifetime of their author.

Denmark's fairy tale poet

In his autobiography, "The Fairy Tale of My Life", Hans Christian Andersen recounts "how much he had to endure" before becoming famous. His fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling" can also be said to depict a remarkable social climb: "It matters nothing if one is born in a duck-yard, if one has only lain in a swan's egg."

In 1987, a theory arose that Hans Christian Andersen was not the biological son of the shoemaker and washerwoman with whom he grew up, but was rather the son of Prince Christian Frederik - later King Christian VIII (1786-1848), and a young noblewoman. The argument is supported by the remarkable encouragement given to the young Andersen, also by the Court, long before his genius was recognized, as well as his later close ties to the Court and various noble families. There are many examples throughout history of placing "illegitimate" children of high-ranking parents with ordinary people. The theory of such an adoption has encountered resistance, and the discussion continues.

Hans Christian Andersen can rightly be called the poet of all of Denmark. In addition to his birthplace Odense and the Danish capital Copenhagen, he had ties with many parts of the country, particularly the manor houses in which he was a welcome guest. For example, Augustenborg in southern Jutland, Glorup on Funen and Holsteinsborg on Zealand.

A house in the Odense neighbourhood in which Andersen grew up was set up as a museum in 1908. It contains manuscripts, letters, drawings and other items that illustrate the life of the poet. It also contains a comprehensive library with editions of Andersen's works in countless languages.

In its early years, Tivoli had a pavilion that featured a bawdy cabaret, presumably the most daring place in town that could be frequented by gentlemen publicly. The high point of daring was reached when the chorus girls lifted up their skirts to show their petticoats. Hans Christian Andersen visited the pavilion on his first visit to Tivoli, the summer the gardens opened in 1843. The famous man attracted attention, and the girls on stage began to direct their risqué songs to him. Unfortunately, today we do not know the words they sang, but they must have been highly improper, as Andersen fled in horror. Another embarrassing episode was in the store for the author, however. He returned to the site of his humiliation, standing outside the pavilion, and gazed through a window. He was ignominiously banished from Tivoli by a guard who did not recognize him. Almost thirty years later, Andersen wrote in his diary: "In Tivoli... today I saw my own bust among those of famous Danes. A colourful butterfly sat on my right shoulder. Was this a happy greeting - an allegory - or does it mean that I shall soon be departing this world?"

Hans Christian Andersen died in 1875, three years after his melancholy observation in Tivoli. The enormous number of letters from admirers that he received and carefully kept bears witness to the international fame of the poet in his later years. There are letters from "beaux-esprits" all over the world, as well as short, touching letters from children. Andersen followed the fate of Dr. Livingstone in Africa through letters from the famous adventurer's young daughter, Anna Marty. Andersen's collection included admiring letters from little Sidney Miller from Detroit, Michigan, and from Edward Tompkins from Baltimore, Maryland.

Chorus girls in the early days of Tivoli - their pavilion was a den of iniquity by the standards of the time.

The whole world's fairy tale author

Hans Christian Andersen was also a man of the world. By the standards of his time, he was an extremely well-travelled man. He travelled abroad 29 times, to places as far away as Greece and Turkey. He had plans to travel to America, and received much encouragement, but his plans were never realized. However, at least ten of his fairy tales were published in the USA before they ever came into print in Andersen's homeland. The tales were published in "The Riverside Magazine for Young People", in cooperation between Andersen and the publisher Horace Elisha Scudder.

Measured in number of translations and editions, plus the actual dissemination among the populace, today Andersen is the author whose works are most widespread. The fairy tales are translated into almost 200 different languages. The works of international figures such as Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe are translated in equally many languages, but their works are not usually read, as are Andersen's, by the general public.

The Hans Christian Andersen Centre was founded in conjunction with the University in Odense, with the objective of supporting the interest in Andersen research at universities all over the world. Previously, Andersen was not the focus of extensive research, either in Europe or the USA. In fact, the western world has only discovered to a limited extent that Andersen can be read to advantage by adults. The story is different east of Denmark. In Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, the Danish poet is an integral part of the intellectual baggage.

He is generally considered to be a philosopher. This is also true in Japan and in China, where Andersen's popularity among 1.1 billion inhabitants is enormous. The number of copies printed is staggering by European standards, and the fairy tales are recognized officially as fitting in very well with the socialist moral code. The two most treasured stories in China are "The Little Match Girl" and - "The Little Mermaid".

View of the dome of St. Peter's, sketched by Hans Christian Andersen during his first visit to Italy in 1833-34. His first meeting with Italy was of great importance to him and formed the basis for his novel The Improvisators.

Illustration from a Japanese edition of The Little Mermaid.

A Writer amongst Women

In the years 1846-47, Hans Christian Andersen became a classic in the English-speaking world. In the course of these two years, nine of Andersen's books, with six different translators, were published in English. Forty-four fairy tales and stories were thereby available in Great Britain, and somewhat later in the United States as well. The Little Mermaid was printed in the magazine "Bentley's Miscellany" in 1846. (Richard Bentley became Andersen's leading publisher in London.) The fairy tale was translated by Lady Lucie Duff Gordon. J. Leech's etching of the little mermaid meeting the old witch of the sea (right) in "Bentley's Miscellany" is the first British illustration of Hans Christian Andersen.

It is Lucie Duff Gordon's translation of the fairy tale that appears in this book. Except for the drawing on page 28 by Vilhelm Pedersen, all the illustrations accompanying the story are by Lorenz Frölich. Hans Christian Andersen met Lady Duff Gordon during his stay in Great Britain in 1847. He also met a number of other prominent women who

Like Hans Christian Andersen, the singer Jenny Lind and the ballerina Lucile Grahn (right) were celebrities in London in 1847.

were luminaries in the literary life of London at the time. Some of them admired him greatly, but it is evident from the notes in Andersen's diary that the admiration was not always mutual.

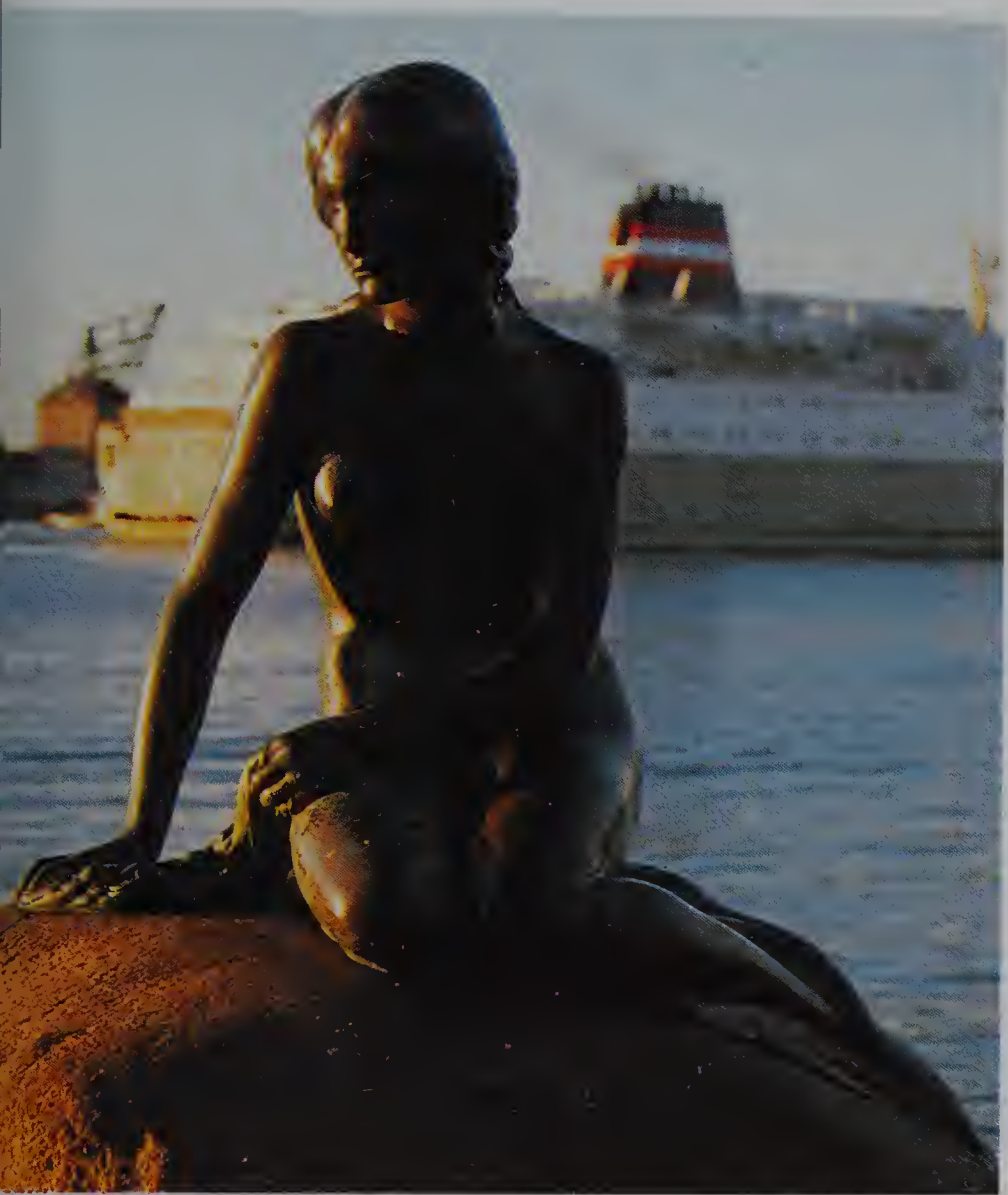
In 1847, Andersen again saw the Swedish singer Jenny Lind in London. He was hopelessly in love with "The Swedish Nightingale", whom he had met for the first time in Copenhagen in 1843, but Jenny Lind preferred to be a "sister" to him. An enthusiastic audience, with Queen Victoria in their midst, cheered Jenny Lind in Her Majesty's Theatre. In the same theatre, as well as privately, Andersen also met the Danish ballerina Lucile Grahn (possibly the inspiration for the dancer in "The Constant Tin Soldier"). During Andersen's first trip to Great Britain, Charles Dickens, whom Andersen greatly admired, came to London to meet the Danish writer. The two men formed a close friendship, but later Dickens began to find Andersen's company rather tiring. One can hardly blame Dickens, for Andersen could barely speak English and took what might be considered unfair advan-tage of Dickens' hospitality. Nevertheless, when Andersen left Eng-land, Charles Dickens was on hand to see him off at Ramsgate pier.

In spite of some adversity and certain disappointments, Hans Christian Andersen felt that he was understood and acknowledged as an author in the English-speaking world more than at home. The British criticism of his work was highly positive, almost without reservations, as Andersen often pointed out to Danish critics.

Leech's depiction of the little mermaid meeting the old witch of the sea was the first British illustration of Andersen's work.

A Creature of yearning

"If she had been thoughtful and silent before, she now became far more so. And when her sisters enquired of her what she had seen on the first day when she visited the upper world, she answered them not. Evening after evening, she visited the shore where she had left the prince." (From the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen)



The statue of The Little Mermaid depicts this wistful, yearning creature who wants to be human, to be loved by a human and to have an immortal soul. It is this yearning that causes The Little Mermaid to abandon her mermaid form, driving her to sorrow and death.

A ballet inspired the creation of a bronze statue of The Little Mermaid. Hans Christian Andersen himself loved the art of ballet, and the little mermaid herself "danced as no woman had ever danced before, and every movement showed her beauty more and more".

The Ballerina's Little Mermaid

The ballet "The Little Mermaid", based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, had its premiere at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on 26 December 1909. The music was by Fini Henriques and the choreography by Hans Bech, ballet master of the Royal Ballet. Ellèn Price de Plane, the celebrated prima ballerina of the Royal Theatre, danced the title role. The fairy-tale ballet was one of the greatest successes in the history of the Royal Theatre.

"She blushed and cast her eyes on the ground when she saw that her fish's tail was changed into a pair of the most beautiful legs that ever were seen."

"The prince gave her costly garments, and she was the fairest of all the inhabitants of the palace."

"Then the prince's lips moved in his sleep, and he spoke the name of his bride - she only was in his thoughts - and in frantic despair, the mermaid raised the knife."

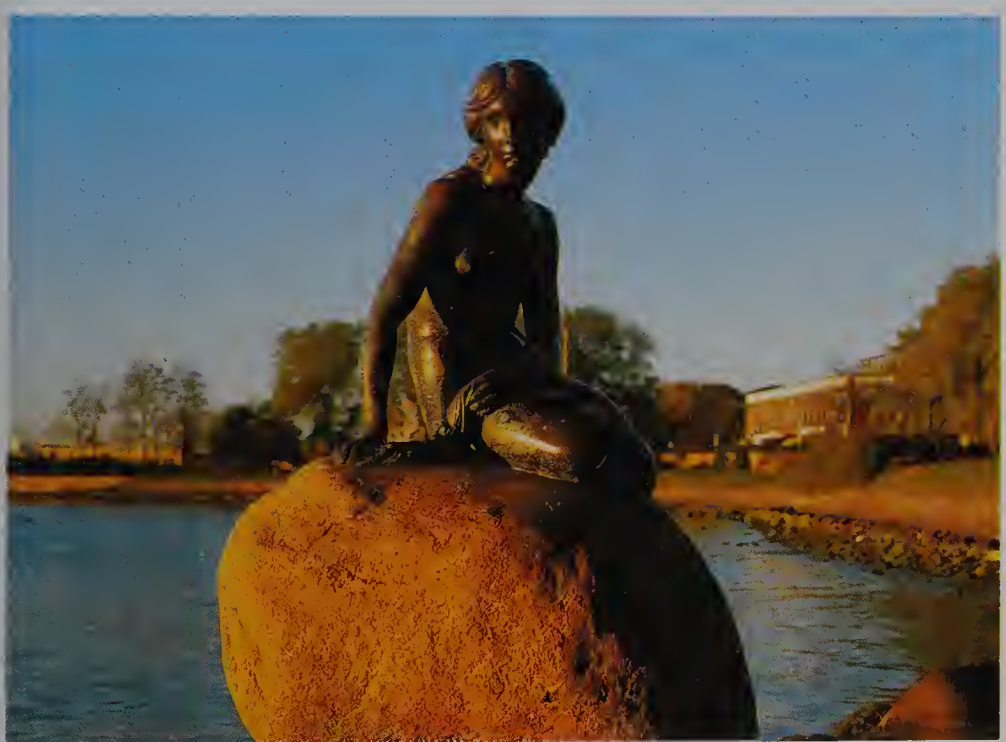
The brewer Carl Jacobsen (right), a patron of the arts, was so moved by the dancing of Ellen Prince de Plane that he decided to present a statue of The Little Mermaid to the city of Copenhagen. The task was assigned to the sculptor Edvard Eriksen (left).

Then and Now

Millions of photographs have been taken of The Little Mermaid at Langelinie in Copenhagen. This one is perhaps the very first; it was taken in 1912 during the preliminary attempt to place the statue.

The Little Mermaid at Langelinie in 1913. The unveiling took place on August 22 of that year. The statue is placed on a "cairn" of granite out in the water, which has undoubtedly contributed to its fame. In ancient Nordic times, the cairn or dolmen marked a burial place, and the form itself, perpendicular rocks topped by a large flat rock, has become a symbol of a link with the past.

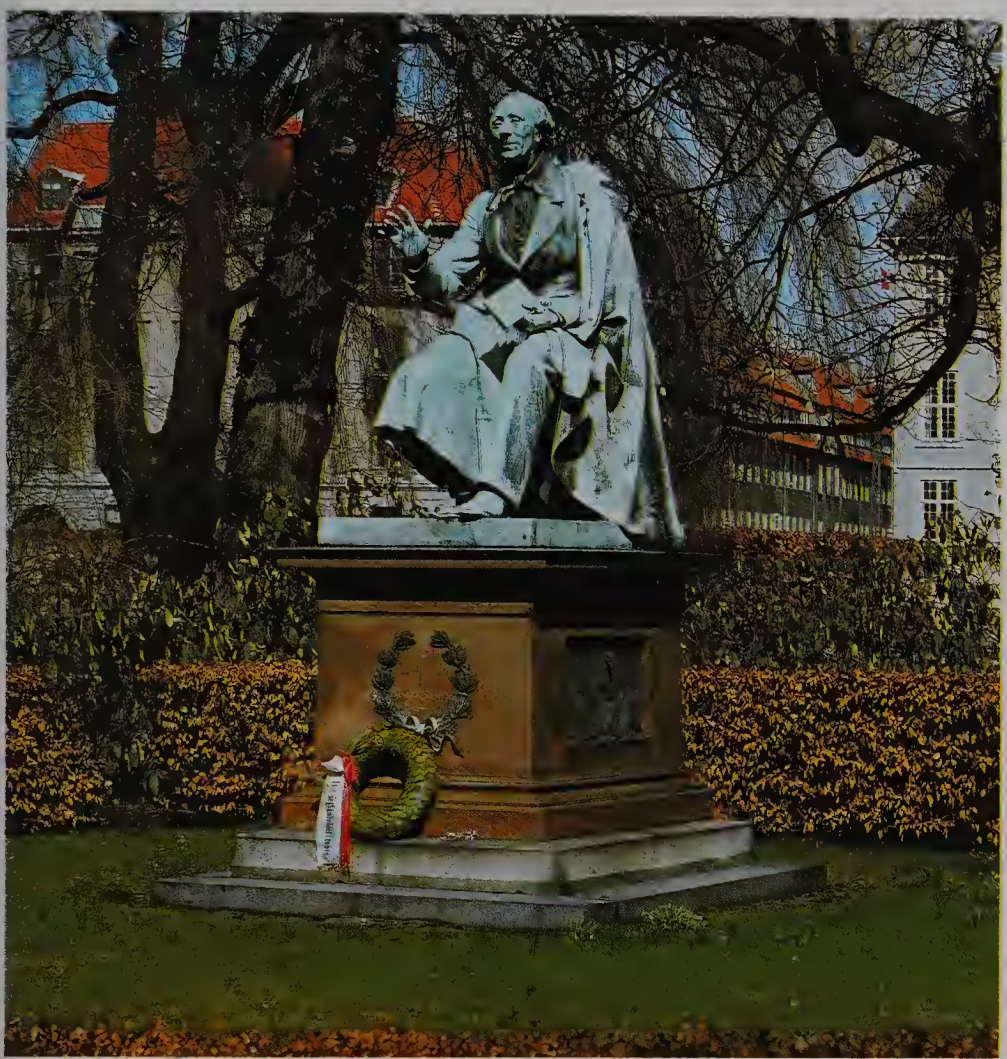
The Little Mermaid with the old Langelinie Pavilion in the background. In the summer of 1944, a large part of the pavilion was blown up on orders from the occupying forces. - The new Langelinie Pavilion is from 1958. In accordance with the artist's stipulations, The Little Mermaid must never be cast in its original size and erected anywhere else.



Her City and her Harbour

For almost a thousand years, merchant ships have sailed the waters upon which The Little Mermaid gazes, sailing to and from the commercial centre given the name Copenhagen in the 12th century (København, the Danish name, means merchant's harbour). The Danish capital dates from the year 1167. During that year, the foundations were laid for a fortress to protect the marketplace of Copenhagen against the pirates who habitually raided the Scandinavian coasts. Since the founding of the city during the period following Viking times, Copenhagen's prosperity has depended upon her harbour and its sea traffic.

As young as she is in comparison to her harbour and city, The Little Mermaid has become a landmark of Copenhagen and the harbour for thousands of sailors.



There are two statues of the author of The Little Mermaid in Copenhagen. August Saabye's statue from 1880 (right) stands in the public park known as "The King's Garden". Opposite the last page in this book is a newer statue of Hans Christian Andersen, which was created by H. Luckow-Nielsen and is located near the Town Hall.

The Little Mermaid's part of the harbour is called Langelinie, a promenade and the major quay for visiting cruisers and naval vessels. Providing the natural background of the statue are the small islands in the channel between the islands of Zealand and Amager.

The Devotion of Millions

The Little Mermaid has become a part of Denmark, even though some people do not appreciate the sentimentality connected with this fact. It is not certain whether art critics will continue to reject the style and "sensitivity" the mermaid represents.

However, the devotion of millions of people to The Little Mermaid will probably continue. This applies both to the little statue at Langelinie in Copenhagen and to the fairy tale of Hans Christian Andersen.

About the fairy tale

The Little Mermaid

Lady Lucie Duff Gordon

Lady Lucie Duff Gordon's translation of The Little Mermaid is the first translation of Hans Christian Andersen into English. It appeared in 1846 in "Bentley's Miscellany".

Lady Lucie Duff Gordon (1821-1869), the wife of Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, was the only child of the prominent jurist John Austin and Sarah Austin, a writer. In the 1840's and 1850's, Lady Duff Gordon translated a number of works from German to English. She is best known for her "Letters from Egypt" (1863) and "Last Letters from Egypt" (1865).

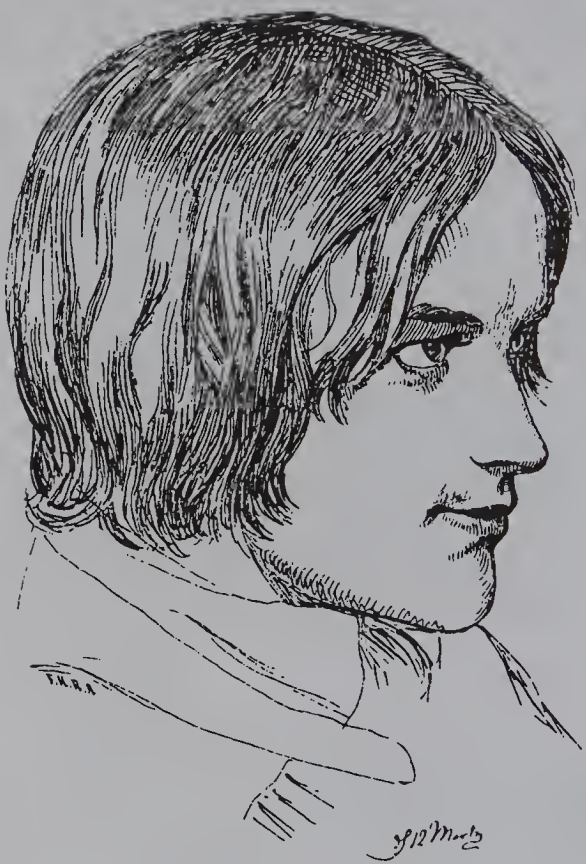
During the summer of 1847, Hans Christian Andersen visited Lady Duff Gordon twice and was reproached for the admiration he seemingly had for Lady Marguerite Blessington, another celebrated member of London's literary world. Actually, in Lady Duff Gordon's circle, it was said that Lady Blessington had managed to marry off her 15-year-old step-daughter to the Count d'Orsay, a popular dandy and wit, so that she herself could acquire the Count as a lover. In the summer of 1847, the young Countess d'Orsay left her husband and went to live with Lady Duff Gordon's friend, Mrs. Caroline Norton, a well-known writer and novelist, whose husband had left her and was now demanding a divorce because of Mrs. Norton's relationship with Lord Melbourne.

It is not easy to keep up with London's literary world in the 1840's.

Vilhelm Pedersen (1820-1859) started to draw illustrations for Andersen's fairy tales in 1848. The writer and the artist apparently came into contact with one another through the Royal Family, as both the Pedersen family and Hans Christian Andersen were on friendly terms with Queen Caroline Amalie.

Pedersen has always been looked upon as the definitive fairy tale illustrator, which is strange since Andersen did not think that he was able to capture the subtlety and imagination of the fairy tales.

Furthermore, Pedersen considered himself to be primarily a painter of sea battles, for he was also a naval officer. He had taken part in the wars against the Holstein insurgents in 1848-50, but was taken prisoner by the Germans during the second year of the rebellion. Imprisonment affected his health, which continued to deteriorate in the years that followed.



"When you drew the lovely little pictures for The Little Mermaid, pictures which never reached the public, it was my most fervent wish that you, yes you, would have the desire to illustrate the fairy tales." The words are those of Andersen and can be found in a letter written to Lorenz Frölich. Frölich had drawn the pictures mentioned in Andersen's letter at the age of seventeen, but more than a hundred years were to pass before they were to become available to the public in their entirety. It was only with the first edition of the book in 1972 that the larger public was given the opportunity to see them for the first time.

The poet's enthusiasm seemingly influenced his Danish publisher, who asked Frölich to become Andersen's illustrator after the untimely death of Vilhelm Pedersen in 1859. Frölich took on the challenge, even though he otherwise concentrated on themes from Nordic history and mythology in the years that followed. Frölich was deeply hurt when he learned that not all critics were equally enthusiastic, but the publisher convinced him that he ought to continue. During the years from 1867 to 1874, he made 323 illustrations for Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. Lorenz Frölich illustrated the works of the great fairy tale writer a third time, with liquid tusche drawings for a deluxe edition published in 1905 in honour of the hundred-year anniversary of Andersen's birth. For this edition of The Little Mermaid, Frölich executed no fewer than twenty drawings. He was then 83 years old. Two of these illustrations can be seen in this book on pages 25 and 32.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

The Little Mermaid

Translated by Lady Lucie Duff Gordon

IN the midst of the wide sea, the water is as blue as the bluest cornflower and as clear as the clearest crystal; but it is so deep that the longest cable cannot reach to the bottom, and that you would have to pile a great number of church-steeples one on the top of the other, to reach from the bottom of the sea to its surface. And down beneath this deep water dwell the people of the sea.

Now you must not suppose that there is nothing down there but white sand, - far from it; there are wondrous trees and plants, with such pliant boughs that they wave to and fro with the slightest movement of the water, as though they were living things. Fish of all shapes and sizes glide among the branches, just as the birds up here fly about in the air; and there where the sea is deepest, stands the palace of the sea-king. The walls of this palace are of coral, the high pointed windows of amber and the roof is covered with shells which open and shut with every wave, and in each shell is a pearl so large and so bright, that any one of them would be the most precious jewel in the crown of a king of the earth.

The sea-king, who lived in this palace, had been a widower for many years, and his old mother kept house for him. She was a clever woman, but very proud of her birth, which was so high that she wore twelve oysters on her tail, whereas the other grand folks of the sea

might wear but six. In all other respects she deserved unmixed praise, especially for her affection towards the young princesses, her granddaughters. These were six beautiful children, but the youngest princess was the most beautiful of them all. Her skin was as soft and as fine as a rose-leaf, her eyes as blue as the deepest sea; and her fish's tail was covered with the most pearly scales. The children played all day long in the great halls of the palace, on the walls of which grew the most beautiful flowers. When they opened the great amber windows, the fish swam in just as with us the swallows fly in when we leave the windows open; but the fish were much bolder, they swam straight up to the little princesses, ate out of their hands and suffered themselves to be stroked by them.

In front of the palace was a great garden, with bright red and deep blue trees, of which the fruit shone like gold; and the flowers in the garden were like burning suns. The ground was of the finest bright-blue sand; and a wondrous azure hue was spread over everything, so that one seemed rather to be up in heaven, than at the bottom of the sea. When the sea was quite calm, the people down below it could see the sun looking like a crimson flower that poured out light from its chalice.

Each of the little princesses had her own garden, which she might plant and lay out as she pleased. One of the princesses shaped her garden like a whale, and another like a mermaid; but the youngest made hers quite round like the sun, and planted in it only flowers which were bright red, as the sun appeared to her. She was a strange child in all respects, that youngest princess, and very reserved and thoughtful. Once, when a ship was wrecked, and her sisters got all sorts of things out of it wherewith to ornament their gardens, she asked for nothing save the beautiful white marble boy which had been found on board, and she set the statue in her garden, and planted a crimson weeping willow beside it, which grew up and hung its long branches till they touched the blue ground, whereon the shadows played in violet colours, as though the top of the tree were kissing the root in sport.

But nothing pleased the little princess so well, as to hear about the

world above the sea. Her old grandmother told her all she knew about ships and towns and men and beasts on the dry land. And, what delighted the little princess most of all, was to hear that the flowers on the land smelt sweetly, which the sea-flowers do not; and that the woods there were green, and that the fish that played among the branches could sing loudly and sweetly. The old grandmother called the birds fish, because the children knew no other creatures.

"When you have reached your fifteenth year," said the old lady, "you will be allowed to rise to the surface of the sea, and to sit upon the rocks in the moonshine, and to see the great ships sail by, and you will also see towns and men."

In the following year the eldest sister reached this happy age; but as for the others, as bad luck would have it, the sisters were each one year younger than the other, so that the youngest had five whole years to wait, before she too might float on the top of the water, and see how things looked in the upper world. But the eldest promised to tell the others everything that she might see on the first day of her coming of age; for all that the old grandmother had told was still very little, and there were so many things of which they wished to hear more.

But of all the sisters, not one longed for her release from the restrains of childhood so ardently as the youngest, who was just the one that had longest to wait; and she grew more and more thoughtful, and at night she often stood at the open window, and looked up through the clear blue water where the fish were playing, at the moon, which appeared to her less bright indeed, but much larger than it does to the people on dry land; and every now and then it was hidden from her by a whale, or by some ship which sailed by, filled with sailors, who had no idea that a little mermaid in the deep sea below them was stretching out her white arms longingly towards the keel of their vessel.

At last the eldest princess reached her fifteenth year, and went to the top of the water. And when she came back she had a thousand things to tell; but what had pleased her best was to sit in the moonshine on a sand-bank, and to look at the great city which lay upon the coast. And there she saw the lights shining like stars; and heard music, and the distant sound of wheels, and men's voices, and

the ringing of the bells in the tall steeples. And she longed violently to go into the town, just because she could not.

The youngest sister listened to her words with the deepest attention, and at night, when she stood at her open window and looked up through the still blue waters, she thought of the great noisy town till she fancied that she heard the ringing of the church-bells. In the following year, the next sister got leave to rise to the surface, and to swim wheresoever she pleased. She reached the top of the sea just as the sun was setting, and this sight delighted her more than anything that she saw above the waves.

"The whole heaven shone like gold," said she, "and I cannot describe the beauty of the clouds; they floated over my head, red and violet, and a whole flock of white swans flew across the waves, with the red light glowwing on their wings; whilst I looked after them, the sun disappeared, and the red light gradually faded from the surface of the sea, and from the edges of the clouds."

And now it was the turn of the third sister to visit the world above. She was the handsomest of them, and so she swam up a river that ran into the sea. And on the banks she saw green hills, covered with vines, and castles and houses rising amidst the woods. And she heard the birds sing; and the sun shone so hot that she was often forced to dive, in order to cool her burning face. And she came to a small bay, where a whole party of little naked children, with two legs and without tails, were splashing about in the water. She wanted to play with them, but they ran away from her to the shore, and a little black beast made such a terrible noise at her that she was frightened, and swam back to the sea. But she could not forget the green woods and the vine-covered hills, and the pretty little children who swam on the top of the water although they had no fins.

The fourth sister was not so bold; she stayed out on the open sea, and when she came home, she told how she thought this most beautiful, and how she had seen for miles round her, and how the heavens hung like a great bell over the sea. And she had seen ships, but only from afar, so that they looked no larger than sea-gulls, and dolphins playing merrily on the top of the water, and whales spouting fountains into the air.

In the year after that, the fifth sister reached her fifteenth year. Her

birth-day was in the winter, and she beheld a very different scene from that which the others had seen when they first rose to the top of the water. The sea was quite green, and great ice-bergs floated about on it. These, she said, shone like pearls, but were far larger than the church-steeples on the land. She told how she had seated herself on one of these great floatting ice-pearls, and had let the wind play with her long hair; but the sailors on the ships that passed were frightened when they saw her, and set their sails in order to escape from the storm. And towards evening the sky was covered with clouds, and the great blocks of ice rose and fell upon the waves and glittered in the red glare of the lightning, and the thunder rolled in the clouds. And now the sails of the ships were furled, and all on board were filled with terror; but she sat quietly on her iceberg, and watched the blue lightning as it struck into the sea.

When these sisters first rose out of the sea, they were delighted by all the new and beautiful things which they saw. But now that they were grown up and could visit the upper world as often as they pleased, the charm of novelty soon wore off, and before long their home seemed far pleasanter to them; for there alone did they feel quite at ease.

Towards evening the five sisters often floated arm in arm on the

surface of the sea. Their voices were far sweeter than the voice of any earthly woman; and when a storm was at hand, they swam beside the ships and sang wondrous songs about the bliss of living at the bottom of the sea, and bade the sailors follow them without fear. But the sailors understood not their words, and mistook their song for the whistling of the wind. Nor indeed did they ever enjoy the sight of the glories below the sea; for when the ships sank, the men who were upon them were drowned, and by the time they arrived at the sea-kings palace, they were mere dead corpses.

Now whilst the five sisters thus floated upon the waves, the youngest princess stood alone at the window of her father's castle, and looked after them, and felt as though she could have cried; but the mermaidens have no tears, and therefore is their grief so infinitely more bitter than that of the dwellers upon earth.

"Oh that I were but fifteen years old!" sighed she; " I am sure that I shall grow so fond of the upper world and of the people that live upon it."

At length the long wished day for fifteenth year arrived.

"Now we have got to get you too out of the nursery," said the old grandmother, "come here, and let me dress you like your sisters."

And so saying, she placed a wreath of white flowers upon her head, and each leaf of the flowers was the half of a large pearl; and then the old woman ordered eight large oysters to hang themselves upon the princess's tail, in token of her high birth.

"But that hurts me so," said the little princess.

"Young ladies must not mind trifling inconveniences", answered the grandmother, "when they dress to go out."

She would have been heartily glad to get rid of all her finery and to take off the heavy wreath, for the red flowers out of her own little garden were pleasanter to wear and far more becoming; but she did not dare to do so before her grandmother.

"Good bye!" said she, and rose as lightly and gracefully as a soap bubble.

The sun had just sunk below the horizon when she reached the top of the water for the first time in her life. The clouds were bathed in gold and rose-colour, and the evening star shone brightly in the sky.

The air was soft and balmy, and the sea as smooth as a looking-glass. A large three-decker lay motionless on the quiet sea, and the sailors sat idly about the deck or in the rigging. There was a sound of music and singing on board; and when it grew dark, thousands of lamps were suddenly lighted all over the vessel, and shone brightly on the flags of all nations which floated in the air. The little mermaid swam close to the cabin window and peeped in every time that she was lifted on the top of a wave. In the cabin she saw numbers of gaily dressed people, but the most beautiful of all was beyond doubt the young prince with the large dark eyes. They were celebrating his seventeenth birth-day, which was the reason of all the festivities on board. The sailors were dancing on the deck; and when the young prince appeared among them, hundreds of rockets rose into the air, making the night as bright as day. The little mermaid, in affright, dived for a few moments, but she soon put her head out of the water again, and now she fancied that all the stars of heaven must be falling upon her. She had never heard of fire, or of the arts of men, and now she saw great suns revolving in the air, and shining fish which were reflected in the smooth sea; and the ship was so brightly lighted up that she could distinguish the smallest objects on board. And the young prince looked so handsome as he shook hands with the sailors and laughed and jested with them, while the music sounded more joyously because of his presence.

It was now late, but the little sea-princess could not tear herself away from the ship and the beautiful prince. But while she was floating on the top of the waves, and gazing at the prince through the cabin windows, a great storm was brewing in the bottom of the sea; and soon the ship began to roll heavily, more sails were spread, and as she scudded before the wind, the waves rose higher and higher, thick clouds gathered over-head, and distant thunder was heard. And, presently the storm was upon them, and they furled all their sails; the great ship was tossed about like a little boat, and the waves ran high like huge black mountains, and broke over the deck. But the good ship rose again like a swan, and climbed to the tops of the towering waves. The little mermaid thought this fine sport, but the crew were quite of another mind.

The ship creaked and groaned and staggered under the heavy sea,

and presently water rushed into the hold; suddenly the mainmast snapped like a reed, and the vessel broke in two, and sunk. And now the little mermaid perceived that the people were in danger, for she had some trouble to save herself from the floating beams and timbers which were tossed about by the waves. It was so dark, that she could distinguish nothing, save when it lightened at every flash she looked for the young prince; but she could not see him, and she knew that all on board must have sunk; and at first she was glad that the young prince would come down to her, but then she remembered that men could not live in the water, and that when he arrived at her father's palace he would be dead. So she swam among the floating fragments, regardless of her own danger, and sought about in all directions, until at length she found the prince, who was so tired with swimming that he was just about to sink. But the little mermaid clasped him in her arms, kept him above the water, and drifted along upon the waves. Towards morning the storm abated, and the sun rose blood-red out of the sea; the prince's cheeks seemed to glow in its first rays, but his eyes remained closed; and the young mermaid kissed his smooth forehead and stroked the wet hair off his face. He now looked just like the marble statue in her garden at the bottom of the sea; she kissed him again and again, and ardently longed to see him open his eyes. Presently she came near the coast, and saw high mountains capped with white snow, and along the coast there was a green forest, in front of which stood a church and a convent; and the convent garden was filled with orange and lemon trees, and among these a few lofty palms. And the sea formed a small bay, in which the water was quite calm, and very deep; but close under the cliff, there was a small slip of fine white sand, and hither the little mermaid brought the fainting prince, and laid him on the warm sand, and took care to raise his head, and to turn his face towards the sun.

The bells were ringing in the great white building before her, and several young girls were walking in the garden. So the little mermaid left the shore, hid herself behind a rock, and covered her head and her long hair with foam and seaweed, so that none might see her, and kept watch who should come near the prince.

Before long a young girl approached him, and at first she seemed quite frightened at sight of him; but she soon recovered herself, and ran to fetch some of her companions. And presently the little mermaid saw the prince open his eyes and smile brightly upon the girls who surrounded him.

But he did not once look after her, for he did not even know that it was she who had saved him. And when the prince went with them into the house near at hand, the mermaid was so sad that she dived down again to the bottom of the sea, and slowly returned to her father's palace.

If she had been thoughtful and silent before, she now became far more so. And when her sisters enquired of her what she had seen on the first day when she visited the upper world, she answered them not.

Evening after evening she visited the shore where she had left the prince, and she saw the fruits in the garden ripen, and the flowers fade, and the snow melt on the high mountains, but the prince she did not see, and every time she returned home sadder than before. And she sat in her little garden embracing the statue that was so like the prince, but she took no heed of her flowers; and they grew up, and climbed all over the trees, and covered the whole garden till it was turned into a wild dark arbour.

At length she could no longer conceal her grief, and confided it to one of her sisters, and of course the other sisters knew the secret directly, and so did a few of their friends, but nobody else; and among the latter there was one who knew the prince by sight, for she too had seen the festivities on board the ship, and moreover she knew the country in which he lived, and the name of the king his father.

"Come, little sister," said the other princesses, embracing her; and they put their arms round each other, and rose in a long row before the coast where stood the prince's palace.

This palace was built of polished yellow marble, and in front of it a broad flight of white marble steps led down to the water. A splendid gilt dome crowned the roof, and the palace was surrounded by pillars, between which stood white marble statues. The crystal-

clear glass in the lofty windows afforded a view into magnificent saloons hung with silken curtains, and filled with the most beautiful pictures; and in the largest of these saloons played a fountain which rose into the glass dome in the roof, and sparkled in the sunbeams.

Now, then, the little mermaiden knew the dwelling of her beloved prince, and every evening and every night she went thither, and drew nearer to the shore than her sisters had dared to do; at last she even swam up the canal beneath the marble terrace which cast a broad shadow across the water. Here she lingered, gazing upon the prince, who thought himself quite alone in the bright moonshine. She often watched him as he sailed in a gilded barge gaily decked with flags and streamers, and she hid herself among the rushes to listen to the sound of his voice; then, if her long silvery veil floated in the breeze, those on board the prince's barge thought it was only a swan spreading his broad white wings.

She often listened the livelong night to the fishermen as they sat at their lines and seemed never to weary of talking in praise of the prince, and then she rejoiced more than ever that she had saved his life when he was already half drowned, and she remembered how his head had rested on her bosom, and fondly she had kissed him, though he knew nothing of it, and could not dream how much he owed her.

And she loved the dwellers upon earth more and more, and wished to belong to them. Their world seemed to her far larger than her own, for they could cross the wide sea in ships, and could climb to the tops of the high mountains upon which rest the clouds of heaven; and their country, covered with thick forests and fertile fields, stretched much farther than the eye of a mermaid could reach; and there were so many things upon the dry land which she wished to have explained to her, but her sisters could give no sufficient answers to her questions; so she was forced to have recourse to the old queen-mother, who was more familiar with the upper world, as she very justly called the land above the waters.

"Do men then live for ever if they are not drowned? Do they never die, as we do who live in the bottom of the sea?"

"Yes indeed," said the old grandmother; "they, like us, must die, and their lives are much shorter than ours, for we may live for three hundred years; but then, when we die, we become foam on the waves, and have not even a grave among our friends. We have no immortal souls, and are like the rushes, which, when once cut down, can never grow again. But men have undying souls, which live after their bodies have turned to earth, and which mount up to the bright stars in the heavens. In like manner as we rise out of the water to look upon the dwellings of men, so do they, when they die, rise to unknown and glorious abodes which we may never behold."

"And why have not we too immortal souls?" asked the little mermaiden. "I would gladly give all my three hundred years of life to be like mankind but for a single day, and then to have a place in the heavenly world!"

"You must not think of such a thing", replied the old grandmother; "besides we are much better off than mankind, and lead a far happier life."

"And must I die, and float about as foam upon the waves of the sea? Shall I never more hear the sweet murmur of the waves, or look upon the bright sun and the glorious flowers? Is there nothing that I can do, grandmother, to gain an immortal soul?"

"Nothing," answered the old lady; "unless, indeed, some man should love thee so dearly that thou shouldst be more to him than father or mother; that he should cling to thee with all his thoughts and

with his whole love, and should cause a priest to join his hand with thine, and should promise thee everlasting faith and love; then, indeed, mightest thou become immortal, for his soul would mingle with thine, and thou wouldst share the salvation promised to men. But that can never be, for the tail, which we think the most beautiful part of our bodies, seems loathsome to the dwellers upon earth, for they know no better; and to please them, one must have a couple of awkward props to one's body, which they call legs".

Hereupon the little mermaiden sighed deeply, and glanced mournfully at the scaly half of her fair body.

"Let us enjoy life, and dance and sing and be merry for three hundred years", continued the old lady. "It is no such bad allowance of pleasure after all, and at the end of it one may rest very comfortably in death. To-night we have a court ball."

The ball was far more splendid than anything upon earth; the walls of the ball-room were of the thickest and clearest crystal, and all round them were ranged rows of bright rose-coloured and grass-green shells of immense size, and in these burned coloured flames which not only illuminated the whole room, but shone so brightly through the crystal walls that the sea seemed all on fire for a great distance around, and fish with crimson, gold, and silver scales glittered in the

light. Athwart the ball-room ran a broad clear stream, and upon this the mermen and mermaidens danced to the sound of their own sweet singing. Now none of all the dwellers upon earth have such beautiful voices as these sea-folks, but that of the little princess was the most beautiful of all, and when she sang all the rest applauded her, and she was well pleased, though she already knew that neither on the earth above nor in the sea beneath was there any voice so sweet as hers. But all her thoughts centred in the world above her, and she could not forget the beautiful prince and her grief because she had no immortal soul; and she stole out of her father's palace, and while all within were rejoicing and feasting, she sat in her neglected little garden and sorrowed. On a sudden she heard the sound of horns above her, and she thought within herself; "Those are the huntsmen of him whom I love better than father and mother, who is ever in my thoughts, and in whose hands I would gladly lay my fate. I will venture everything in order to gain him and an immortal soul. While my sisters are dancing and rejoicing, I will go to the old witch of the sea; for much as I have always feared her, there is none other that can help me."

And the little mermaide left the garden, and went to the whirlpool beyond which dwelt the old witch; she had never come this way before, and no sea-flowers or sea-weed grew here, and the bare grey sand stretched as far as the entrance of the whirlpool, where the waters twisted and foamed and swallowed up whatever came within their reach. She had to pass through this raging eddy in order to reach the possessions of the old witch; and then she had to cross a long tract of boiling mud, which the old witch called her turf bog. Beyond this wilderness was her house, surrounded by a forest of polypi, which looked like hundred-headed serpents growing out of the ground, but as large as full-grown trees. Their long slimy branches covered with twigs, like wriggling worms, were constantly moving and stretching themselves in all directions, and whatever came within their reach they clasped so tightly that it could never again escape. The little mermaid stood aghast before this horrible forest, her heart beat with terror, and she would have turned back again without fulfilling her errand, had not fresh thoughts of the prince, and of the immortal soul she hoped to gain, filled her with courage. So she bound up her long flowing hair that the polypi might not seize her by

it, folded her delicate arms tightly across her bosom, and darted, faster than a fish can swim through the water, between the horrible trees, which vainly stretched out their greedy arms to grasp her. But she saw every tree had seized something which it held with a thousand small branches more tightly than in iron fetters. The white skeletons of men who had been drowned at sea grinned in the clasp of these polypi; and there were chests, and fragments of vessels, and skeletons of animals, and even a little mermaid, whom they had drawn towards them and strangled. You may guess how frightened the poor princess was at sight of this.

After passing safely through this forest, she came to a slimy place where huge bloated sea-snails were rolling about and turning up their loathsome yellow stomachs; and in the midst of this place stood a house built with the bones of shipwrecked sailors, and here sat the old witch holding a great toad to her lips, as with us girls feed a tame Canary bird. And she called the large fat snails her chickens, and let them lie on her lap.

"I know already what you want of me", said she to the little princess; "your scheme is a very foolish one, but I will not refuse to fulfil a wish which cannot fail to lead you to misery and destruction, my fair young princess. You would like to be rid of your tail, and to get a couple of stilts instead of it such as they upon earth move with, in order that the prince may love you, and that from him you may gain an immortal soul."

Hereupon the old witch laughed so loudly and so violently, that her pet toad and snails fell upon the ground and rolled about biting one another.

"You come in the very nick of time," continued she; "if you had waited until after sunrise to-morrow, I could not have helped you for a whole year: but I will now make ready a drink which you must take and swim to shore with it, and seat yourself upon the ground, and then swallow the potion; and when you have so done, your tail will change into those things which men call legs: but this change is a painful one, and you will feel as though a sharp sword were drawn through your whole body. And all who behold you will say that you are the most beautiful among the children of men; and you will keep your floating gait, and no dancer in the world will have such grace

and lightness as you. But every step that you take will cause you unbearable pain, and you will always feel as though you were treading on the edge of a sharp sword. Now then, if you are willing to endure all these tortures, I will fulfil your wish."

"Yes I am willing," answered the little princess, with a trembling voice; for the thought of her beloved prince, and of her hopes of an immortal soul.

"But remember," said the witch, "that when you have once taken human shape you can never again become a mermaid; you can never more see your father's palace or visit your sisters; and if you fail to win the prince's love, so that he forget father and mother for your sake, and desire nothing on earth but you, and so that he let a priest join his hand with yours, that you may become man and wife, - you will not after all gain an immortal soul. The day which follows his union with another woman will be the day of your death, for your heart will burst with grief, and you will become sea-foam."

"I will venture it, nevertheless!" replied the little mermaid, pale and breathless as one about to die.

"But then you must pay me for the trouble," said the old witch, "and I shall not be content with a trifle. Your voice is the sweetest among all the dwellers in the sea, and with it you doubtless hope to

charm the prince; but your voice it is that I demand as my fee. I must have the very best thing that you possess in return for my magic potion, for I shall have to mix my own blood with it in order to make it keen as a two-edged sword".

"But if you take from me my voice," said the princess, "what have I left wherewith to win the prince?"

"Your glorious body, your graceful motion, and your speaking eyes," said the witch. "Are not these enough to madden the vain heart of man? How now, is all your courage fled? Put out your little tongue that I may cut it off and take it as my reward."

"Be it so!" replied the princess: and now the old witch hung her cauldron over the fire to brew the magic draught.

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," quoth she, seizing a handful of young toads wherewith to wipe the pot. She then made a gash in her breast, and let her black blood run into the cauldron, from which the steam rose in such fearful shapes that the poor mermaiden shook with affright: every minute the old witch threw in some fresh ingredient, and the mixture boiled and bubbled, and at length there issued from the pot a moaning almost as terrible as that of the mandragora when it is torn out of the earth. And now the magic draught was ready, and had become clear and sparkling as the purest water.

"There, take it," said the witch, as she gave the phial to the princess and at the same moment cut out her tongue; and thenceforth, the poor little mermaid was dumb, and could neither sing nor speak.

"If the polypi try to seize you as you pass through my pleasure grounds," added the witch, "you have only to sprinkle one drop of this mixture upon them, and their branches will be shivered into a thousand fragments."

But the princess had no need to do this, for they drew back from her in affright as she passed them, holding in her hand the phial, which flashed like a bright star; and the princess returned safely through the forest and the bog and the roaring whirlpool.

When she reached her father's palace, all within was dark and silent, and she would not enter to take leave of her sisters, for she knew that they were asleep, and, moreover, she could not now speak. But when she thought that she was going to leave her home for ever, her heart was ready to burst; and she went into her sisters' gardens

and plucked a flower out of each in remembrance of them, kissed her hand over and over again towards the palace, and then rose to the surface of the dark waters.

The sun had not yet risen, and the moon still shone upon the prince's dwelling, as she mounted the well-known marble steps. The little mermaid drained the phial, and the piercing draught seemed to cut her like a sharp sword, and she fell fainting on the ground. But when the sun rose she awoke with a burning pain in all her limbs; and before her stood he whom she loved so well, gazing upon her with his great dark eyes. She blushed and cast her eyes on the ground when she saw that her fish's tail was changed into a pair of the most beautiful legs that ever were seen; and, because she was naked, she covered herself with her long thick hair. The prince asked her who she was, and how she came there; and she smiled upon him, but, alas! she could no longer speak. Then he took her by the hand and led her towards the palace, and at every step, as the witch had foretold her, she felt as though she were treading on sharp swords; but she bore the pain right gladly, for she held the hand of him she loved, and, as she floated along, all marvelled at her beauty and her grace.

The prince gave her costly garments, and she was the fairest of all the inhabitants of the palace.

Beautiful slave-girls, clothed in silk and gold, sang before the prince; and he praised one who sang better than the rest. Then the mermaid was very sad, for she could once have sung far better than all the slave-girls.

"Alas!" thought she, "did he but know that for his sake I gave up my sweet voice for ever!"

But now the slave-girls began to dance; and the mermaid rose, and stretched out her soft white arms, and floated along as no woman had ever danced before, and every fresh movement shewed her beauty more and more, and her eyes spoke more feelingly to the heart than the singing of all the slave-girls.

All who beheld her were charmed by her beauty, and the prince called her his sweet foundling; and she danced again and again, and always more and more gracefully, but at every step she suffered pain like that of treading on sharp knives; but she bore it gladly, for the

prince said that she should never leave him; and he ordered a bed to be made for her, with velvet cushions, in his antechamber.

And he set her upon a horse that she might follow him out riding, and they rode side by side through the fragrant forests where the green branches brushed their cheeks, and the birds warbled joyously among the leaves. And with him she climbed the highest mountains; and when her tender feet bled, she bore it gladly, and smiled as she stood beside her beloved prince on the mountain-top, and saw the clouds floating beneath her.

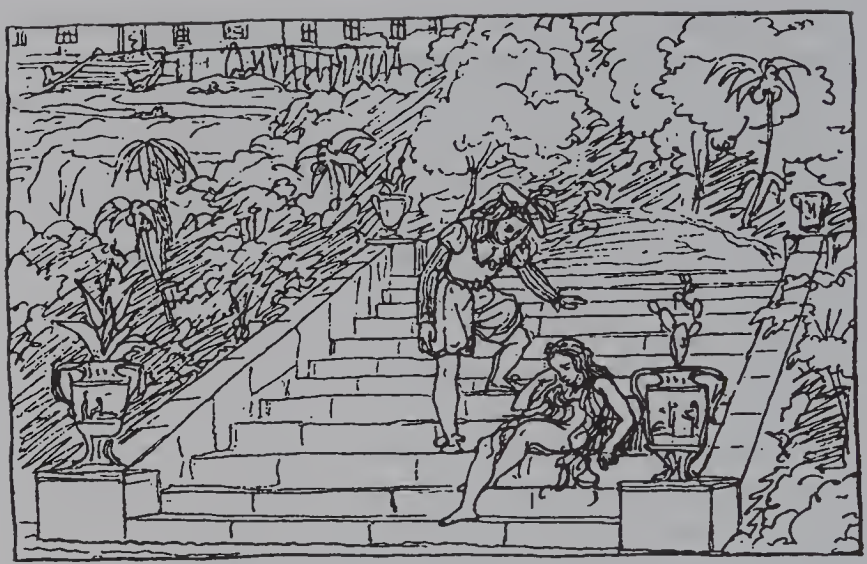
But at night, when every one else in the palace slept, she went down the marble steps, and bathed her aching feet in the cool seawaves, and thought of her sisters in the deep.

And one night they swam towards her, embracing each other, and singing, oh! so sadly; and she beckoned to them, and they knew her, and came nearer, and told her how great was the grief for her in her father's palace; and henceforth they visited her every night, and once they even brought their old grandmother, who had not visited the upper world for many a long year, and their father the sea-king, with his crown upon his head; but the two old people would not venture so near the shore that they might speak to her.

And every day the prince grew more fond of the little mermaiden; he loved her as one loves a sweet and dear child, but he never once thought of making her his wife; and the poor mermaid was sad when she remembered that she could never gain an immortal soul, but must perish and become sea-foam, unless he loved her as a man loves a woman.

"Am not I dearer to thee than any other?" - thus her eager eyes seemed to ask when he clasped her in his arms, and pressed his lips to her forehead.

"Yes," replied the prince to her inquiring gaze, "I love thee best of all, for there is none other so good as thou, and of all my friends thou art most devoted to me; and then, thou art so like a maiden whom I once saw, but whom I may never hope to see again. I was once on board a ship, which was wrecked in a sudden storm, and the waves washed me on shore near a con-vent wherein many maidens lead a religious life; and the youngest amongst these maidens found me lying senseless on the shore, and she saved my life. I saw her but



once, and yet her image is ever before me, and she is the only woman whom I can ever love. But thou art strangely like her, - so like that at times thy image effaces her from my soul; and she whom I love belongs to God alone, but thou wert sent by fate to comfort me, and never will I part from thee!"

"Woe is me! he knows not that I it was who saved him!" thought the mermaiden, with a heavy sigh. "I bore him through the angry waves to the grove wherein the convent stands; I hid myself behind the rocks, and watched until some one should come to help him; and alas! I saw the beautiful maiden approach, whom he loves more than me!" and the poor mermaid felt as though her heart would burst, for she could not weep. "But he says that she belongs to God alone, and can never live in the world, and that he will never see her more. But I - I am with him, - I see him every day, and I will watch over him and serve him and love him and give up my whole life to him!"

At this time the people said among themselves, "Our prince is going to marry the beautiful daughter of the neighbouring king, that is why such a gorgeous ship has been made ready for him, and why so many attendants are to follow him. 'Tis said, indeed, that he only goes to travel in a foreign country; but we know better. The truth is, that he is going to see the princess."

But the little mermaid only laughed at these words; for she knew what the prince thought and felt better than any one else.

"I must go", he said to her. "My parents have commanded me to see the beautiful princess; but they do not wish to force me to bring her home as my bride. But I never can love the princess, for she cannot be like the beautiful maiden in the convent; and if I must choose a wife, I would choose none other but thee, my dumb foundling with speaking eyes."

And he kissed her red lips, and stroked her long hair, and laid his head upon her bosom till her heart was full of the hope of human joys and of an immortal soul.

"Thou dost not surely fear the water, my dumb favourite?" he fondly asked her, as they stood upon the deck of the splendid ship which was to bear him to the country of the neighbouring king; and then he told her of the sea, of its storms and its calms, and of the strange things that were in it, and of the wonders that bold divers had seen in the deep; and she smiled at his words, for she knew better than any child of earth what was in the depths of the sea.

On one bright moonlit night, when all on board slept save only the man at the helm, she leaned over the side of the ship and gazed upon the sea, and as she watched the ripple of the waves against the side of the ship, she almost fancied that she could see her father's castle in the bottom of the sea. Presently her sisters appeared upon the top of the water, and fixed their eyes mournfully upon her, and stretched out their arms towards her, and she beckoned to them and smiled, and would have told them how all went on according to her wish, when, at that moment, a sailor boy came near, and her sisters dived so quickly that the boy thought that it was but white sea-foam that he had seen shining upon the waves.

Next morning the vessel entered the harbour of the splendid city belonging to the neighbouring king; and all the bells were rung, and trumpets were blown, and soldiers paraded in the streets with flags flying and armour glittering in the sun, and each day brought some fresh ball or banquet. But the princess was not yet in the city; she was a long way off, in a convent where she had been brought up in the practice of every princely virtue. At length she arrived.

The little mermaid was most anxious to see her, and, when the

princess came, she was forced to own that on earth she head never beheld a more beautiful creature. She was so fair and white that all her veins appeared through her skin, and a pair of deep brown eyes flashed under her dark eyebrows.

"Thou art she", cried the prince when he beheld her, "who saved my life when I lay as dead upon the sea-shore;" and he pressed his beautiful bride to his beating heart.

"Oh! I am but too happy," said he to the poor little mermaid; "that which I never dared to hope has happened. Thou wilt rejoice in my joy, for thou lovest me more than all the other friends who surround me." And the mermaid kissed his hand in silent anguish, and felt as though her heart must break before his bridal day, which was to be that of her death.

And once more the church bells were rung, and heralds rode through the streets of the city proclaiming the marriage of the princess and at every altar fragrant incense was burnt in silver censers, and the bride and bridegroom clasped each other's hands, whilst the priest blessed their union. The little mermaid stood behind the princess clothed in silk and gold, and held up the train of her bridal dress. But neither did her ear hear the solemn music, nor her

eye see the holy ceremony; - she was thinking of her death, and of the hopes of love and the world to come, which she had lost for ever.

In the evening the bride and bridegroom went on board the ship; the guns were fired, and all the flags were flying, and on the deck was a gorgeous tent of purple and cloth of gold, and in the tent a soft, rich couch was prepared for the royal pair, and here they were to sleep, for the night was soft and calm.

A favourable breeze filled the sails, and the ship glided smoothly over the face of the blue sea. As soon as it was dark, gay lamps were hung in the rigging, and the sailors began to dance upon the deck. The little mermaid thought of the ship which was wrecked when she first visited the upper world. Then she had wondered at the splendour - to-night she danced like a hunted swallow. All who looked upon her shouted with delight, for she had never danced with so much grace. Her feet, indeed, suffered intolerable pain, but she felt it not, for the anguish of her heart was boundless. This, then, was the last night on which she was to see him for whose sake she had left her home and her family, for whom she had sacrificed her sweet voice, and for whom she had daily endured the most terrible pain, though he knew it not. This, then, was the last night on which she was to breathe the same air with him whom she loved so passionately, on which she was to enjoy the sight of the deep sea and of the starry heaven; for an endless night, a dreamless sleep awaited her. The ship rung with loud rejoicings until long past midnight, and even the mermaid laughed, with the thought of eternal death in her bleeding heart. But the prince kissed his lovely bride, and she played with his dark hair, and, clasped in each other's arms, they went to rest in the gorgeous tent.

And now all was hushed and silent in the ship, and only the steersman remained upon the deck; and the little mermaiden rested her white arms upon the vessel's side, and looked towards the east; she was watching for the first ray of the sun, at sight of which she was to perish. Presently her sisters rose out of the sea: they were deadly pale, and the long hair which used to float upon their shoulders had been cut off.

"We gave it to the old witch," said they, "that she might help thee, and that thou perish not this night. She gave us this knife; see how sharp it is! Haste, take it, and before the sun rises, plunge it into the

prince's heart, and let his warm blood run upon thy feet, and they will again become a fish's tail, and thou wilt be once more a mermaid, and wilt live full three hundred years, until thou melt into sea-foam. Haste now, for ere the sun rise he or thou must die. Our grandmother grieves for thee so sorely that her grey hairs have fallen off with sorrow, like ours under the shears of the old witch. Haste, kill the prince and return to us. See yonder red cloud in the heavens shows that the sun is close at hand; a few minutes more and thou art lost." With these words they sighed heavily, and disappeared below the waves.

The little mermaid drew aside the purple hangings of the tent, and beheld the prince sleeping on the bosom of his beautiful bride; and she bent over them, and kissed his broad forehead, and looked again towards the east where the dawn grew brighter every instant. Then the prince's lips moved in his sleep, and he spoke the name of his bride, - she only was in his thoughts, - and in frantic despair the mermaid raised the knife. But in a moment she flung it far from her into the sea; and where it fell flames rose from the waves, and the water seemed stained with blood. And the mermaid once more fixed her dying eyes on him whom she loved better than her own soul, and plunged into the waves where her sweet body quickly melted away into foam.

And now the sun rose out of the sea, and its rays fell so warm and bright upon the waves, that the mermaid scarce felt the pains of death. She saw the red sun and the white sails of the ship, and the rose-coloured clouds, and, floating in the air above her, thousands of lovely transparent creatures, whose heavenly voices could not be heard any more than their airy shapes can be seen by men. They had no wings, but floated along, lighter than the air which bore them. And the mermaid now saw that her body had become like theirs, and that she was rising out of the foam into the air.

"Whither do ye bear me?" said she, and her voice sounded like heavenly music.

"To the daughters of the air," was the answer, "you mermaidens have no immortal soul, save when you gain the love of a son of earth; your eternal life depends upon the will of others: - neither have the

daughters of the air an immortal soul, but we may win one for ourselves by good deeds. We fly to hot countries where the sultry air brings pestilence to man, and we fan him with cool breezes. We scatter the fragrance of flowers, which brings health and delight. And thus, when we have done all the good in our power during three hundred years, we gain an undying soul, and share the salvation of man. And thou, poor mermaiden, hast done more than we, thou hast loved and suffered, and therefore thou art raised into the world of airy spirits, where, in three hundred years, thou mayest win an undying soul for thyself."

And the mermaiden stretched her transparent arms towards heaven, and for the first time, she wept.

On board the ship, noise and rejoicing were now heard once more; the mermaid saw how the prince and his lovely bride were seeking for her, and they looked sadly into the sea, as though they knew that she must have plunged into it. And she kissed the bridegroom's forehead unperceived, gazed once more fondly upon him, and followed the daughters of the air as they rose on high saying, "After three hundred years we shall thus enter into the kingdom of heaven."

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She is admired, loved, worshipped. But there are some who hate her and covet her.

People quarrel over who she is and what she actually expresses.

She herself sits mournfully dreaming somewhere between the human world and her own - out in the sea where the water is as blue as the petals of the loveliest cornflower.

The Little Mermaid is a dream, a riddle, a story.

In this book you will meet the famous fairytale writer, the dancer, the sculptor and the others who created The Little Mermaid and made her famous.

And Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, The Little Mermaid.

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